

Let's Get Ready

By LCdr. Will Mackin

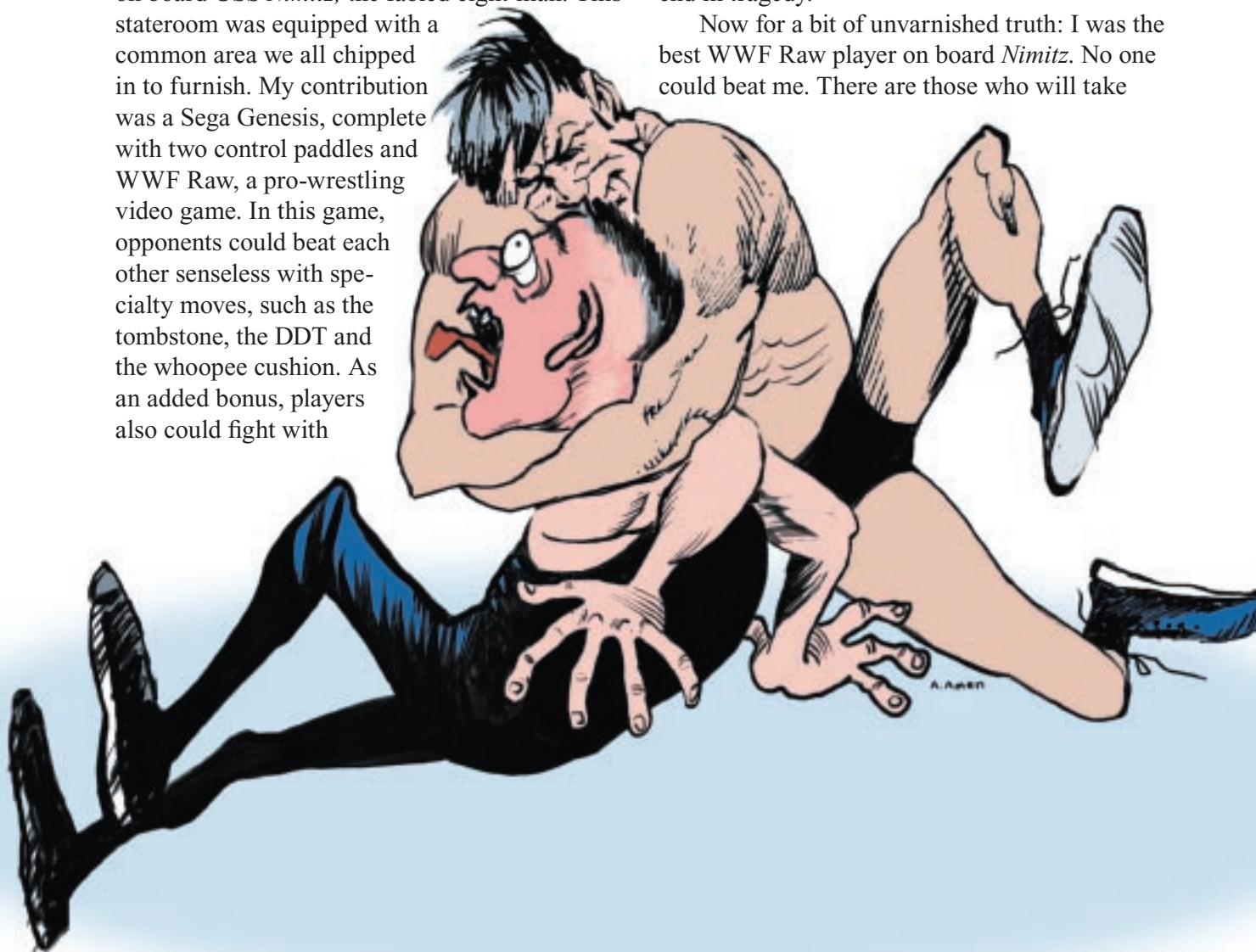
Competition among squadronmates has long been a tradition in naval aviation. Debates over who is the best ball-flyer, who gets the most sleep, and who eats the most dog, can be traced to the origins of our profession. Competitiveness since has become part of our nature, an attribute, which, at its best, provides the fuel to drive us to our loftiest goals, but, at its worst, can lead astray our better judgment.

My story begins in compartment 03-64-8-L on board USS *Nimitz*, the fabled eight-man. This stateroom was equipped with a common area we all chipped in to furnish. My contribution was a Sega Genesis, complete with two control paddles and WWF Raw, a pro-wrestling video game. In this game, opponents could beat each other senseless with specialty moves, such as the tombstone, the DDT and the whoopee cushion. As an added bonus, players also could fight with

pails, folding chairs, and sections of crowd-control fence. Life in the eight-man was a lot more fun, thanks to WWF Raw.

During the first weeks of cruise, 1 v 1 brouhahas on the Sega were nonstop. The entire squadron JOPA was involved. We played during deafening flight ops and evening prayer. We even played while sucking rubber at GQ. The natural byproduct of playing this hysterical WWF Raw was a healthy, competitive spirit. Little did we know we were headed down a path that would end in tragedy.

Now for a bit of unvarnished truth: I was the best WWF Raw player on board *Nimitz*. No one could beat me. There are those who will take



to Rumble

issue with that statement, but don't listen to them. Better yet, tell them to write their own article.

As CVN-68's crown champion of WWF Raw, I took on all comers. The most tenacious challenger was a fellow lieutenant I will call Brand X. He was the product of a division III school in beautiful, downtown Schenectady, N.Y., where he played football. I imagine he played by flinging himself around on special teams.

Although I handily could defeat him at the temple of WWF Raw, Brand X occasionally would succeed in throwing me out of the ring, then, by some trick of faulty programming, prevent me from reentering. The result would be what the WWF Raw instruction booklet refers to as a "time out," not a victory per se but more like an official interruption in play. Anyway, the fact Brand X was able to throw me out of the ring in the first place made him the second best WWF Raw player on board *Nimitz*. He therefore, was, my nemesis.

What began as competitive banter between Brand X and me at the Sega, soon degenerated into idle threats made elsewhere. We talked trash at chow, insulted each other's moms via sound-powered phone, and published disparaging POD notes. With Brand X and me locked in mortal combat, the rest of the JOs chose sides. Amazingly, over half of them—bleeding hearts mindlessly drawn to the plight of the underdog—backed Brand X.

Fast forward to Hong Kong, our first port call. After catching a late liberty boat ashore, I arrived at the squadron admin to find the place curiously devoid of furniture. A band of giggling JOs was on the balcony. Before I could say booby trap, Brand X came at me with a flying pipe. A cheer rose from the balcony. I ducked the pipe,

then, grabbing Brand X in midair, I administered a suplex-to-pile-driver combo. The balcony fell silent. Flummoxed by my onslaught, Brand X got up slowly. Then he stumbled backward, tripped over someone's backpack, and broke his ankle.

Sissy anklebones and cheesy Sega play aside, Brand X was good people. He was part of the glue that held our squadron JOPA together. So, the day after our match was a sad one. We all gathered on the quarterdeck to wave goodbye, as Brand X rode his crutches down the brow, headed home. After his untimely departure, squadron morale never was the same.

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The tragedy here is not that Brand X got hurt, or that squadron morale took a hit. It is that we allowed our competitiveness to override our common sense. Although my story is less serious than others, it shares a common bottom line. Had we recognized where we were headed, a loss could have been avoided. When someone bets he can do a lower flyby or a sharper clearing turn, or crack a pail over your head 20 times in a single round of WWF Raw, try to stifle your competitive instincts. Rather than up the ante, offer to settle the matter like adults: rock, paper, scissors, best out of three wins. 🏆

LCdr. Mackin flies with VAQ-142.